

# Groundfish Economic Assistance Status

## Background

The funding for this program was appropriated by Congress and signed into law by President Bush on August 2, 2002, in *The Supplemental Appropriation Act for Further Recovery From and Response to Terrorist Attacks on the United States*. Section 210 of the Act allocated \$11 million for economic assistance to fishermen and the fishing communities of New England affected by fishing restrictions and federal closures in the northeast groundfish fishery especially those mandated by the recent court order in April of 2002.. The Massachusetts share of the appropriation is \$5.5 million and will be distributed directly to qualifying fishermen affected by the groundfish restrictions.

Similar funds were granted to Maine (\$2.0 million), New Hampshire (\$2.0 million) and Rhode Island (\$1.5 million). *MarineFisheries* was designated by the Governor's Fishing Assistance Advisory Council to administer the grant, which was issued by the Northeast Region of NOAA Fisheries. *MarineFisheries* is responsible for distributing the funds among permit holders impacted by the continuing cutbacks in federal and state groundfish fisheries. Industry input to the Advisory Council came from representatives of the Massachusetts Fishery Recovery Commission, Trawler Survival Fund, Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fisherman's Association, the Massachusetts Fishermen's Partnership, the Gloucester Fishermen's Wives, and the public at three public meetings held in November and December, 2002.

There are two main objectives of the Massachusetts program: The first is aimed at providing immediate aid to vessel owners who have lost federally allocated "Days-at Sea." The program will provide compensation for lost income due to the reductions in the available days-at-sea incurred during the 2002-2003 fishing period as a result of court-ordered reductions. The second objective is to provide relief for gill-netter and dragger vessel owners who have state permits but not federal permits, and have had to replace gear due to state regulations. In order to qualify for either program, permit holders must be actively engaged in the 2002-2003 groundfish fishery. *MarineFisheries* is also making a substantial effort to identify crew members who are not eligible for any other assistance to provide assistance for health insurance premiums – if funds are available.

## Update

*MarineFisheries* has mailed out applications to potentially qualifying fishermen, and is processing the applications as they are returned. Applications from Federal Permit Holders must be postmarked no later than March 7, 2003. Applications from State-only CAP and Gillnet Permit Holders must be postmarked no later than March 10, 2003. It is expected that funds will be distributed in April, 2003.

Vessel owners of federal permits who lost more than two days at sea will receive compensation for those lost days based on their day-at-sea usage in 1996 through 2001. Vessel owners who fish exclusively in state waters, and use otter trawls or gillnets to target groundfish may qualify for assistance intended to help with gear replacement costs imposed by recent state regulations.

To be eligible vessel owners who fish in federal waters must have landed at least 10,000 pounds of groundfish in either fishing years 2000, or 2001. Fishermen who fish exclusively in state waters must have landed at least 10,000 pounds in 2001 or 2002. In all cases landings must be verified by trip reports or landing slips. Fishermen who participated in the permit buyout of 2001, received assistance through the states of Maine or New Hampshire, or who have had, or currently have penalties pending against their state or federal permit are not eligible for participation in this program.

In the event of a federal permit being sold or transferred during the fishing year that started May 1, 2002, *MarineFisheries* has decided that the vessel owner who held the federal permit at the start of the fishing year will be the one who may be eligible for compensation for Lost Days at Sea.

Finally, fishermen who disagree with the qualifying criteria or have other issues regarding this program may appeal by sending a letter to Cindy Smith, (the Program Coordinator at *MarineFisheries*) at 251 Causeway St. Suite 400, Boston, MA 02114.

For more information contact Cindy Smith at (617) 626-1521, or by email at [cindy.smith@state.ma.us](mailto:cindy.smith@state.ma.us).